

The Curriculum Development in Training Teachers Providing Mainstreaming Programs for Children with Special Needs in Primary School Level, Southern Thailand

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Abstract

In Thailand, children with special needs have fewer benefits in inclusive education mainly because instructors are not trained as special education teachers. The ultimate goal of this research was to construct training curriculum for the instructors, providing them with knowledge to better manage these children. The purposes of this research were to study the present situation of the special education services among special needs children at primary level in Area 1, Songkhla Province, South Thailand, identify barriers and needs of teachers within the mainstream programs, construct a training curriculum for teachers and to assess the effectiveness of the proposed curriculum. The curriculum development program comprised four steps. First, the present situation in providing special education services was studied; the barriers and the needs of teachers were identified. Second, the curriculum for training purposes was written. Third, the trial training curriculum and its assessment were carried out. Fourth, the curriculum was revised. The research design was one group pretest - posttest. The sample consisted of 20 representative teachers. The results of the research showed that the effectiveness of the curriculum was scored as 82.07/81.17, slightly higher than the set criteria of 80/80 indicating that the curriculum was appropriate for implementation. There was a significant different at the .01 level among the average posttest and pretest scores of the participants. The results of the test indicated that this curriculum improved knowledge of the teachers. Positive teacher comments included: increase of knowledge, understanding the benefits of the training, ability to apply knowledge, better skills in the management of teaching children with special needs and increased self confidence. This training course has been promoted to other inclusive schools in the area. It should be noted that the development of the training course needs to be conducted on a continuous basis.

1. Introduction

Education is a key process to develop human quality, which is very important in developing countries. People with disabilities should be considered equal to the rest of society. People with disabilities can reach their potential to be a self-reliant and live in society happily if they receive proper support. Furthermore, they could support their society as well as other people. From the IDEA was originally enacted by Congress in 1975 to ensure that children with disabilities have the opportunity to receive a free appropriate public education, just like other children. Thailand also has Persons with Disabilities Education Act B.E. 2551 (2008) which is intended for persons with disabilities to be able to access education services and other resources at all levels and to improve the Thai educational system to enhance their quality of life and independent living through empowerment. In section 3, they classified 9 groups of people with disabilities as: people with visual impairments, people with hearing impairments, people with health or physical disabilities, people with communication problems, people with behavioral or emotional problems, people with learning disabilities, people with intellectual disabilities, people with autism, and people with multiple disabilities.

Education for people with disabilities focuses on equal opportunities in formal education, informal education, and lifelong education. Education for all was set by UNESCO, to be reached by the year 2015 as "The right to education is universal and must extend to all children, youth, and adults with disabilities. The goal of the Dakar Framework for Action is to achieve "education for all". In Thailand, this goal was encouraged, and lead by some schools since 2005. Based on the principle of public education that has been defined clearly in The Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand B.E. 2550 (2007) states that a person shall enjoy an equal right to receive education for the duration of not less than 12 years, which shall be provided by the State, and be of the requisite quality standard, and without charge. In paragraph 3 states that poor people, people with disabilities or people who are in difficult condition must receive support from the government, and be able to receive education comparable with others. The Thai Constitution B.E. 2550 (2007) contains

anti-discrimination provisions and guarantees accessibility to social welfare and services for persons with disabilities. This means that people have the right to all basic education equally, regardless of their health or physical condition. However, the government must provide facilities and assistance, in accordance with section 54 as - the Persons with Disabilities Education Act B.E. 2551 (2008) which is intended for persons with disabilities to be able to access education services and other resources at all levels and to improve the Thai educational system to enhance their quality of life and independent living through empowerment.

Education for people with disabilities focuses on developing their individual potential, promoting their potential by providing early intervention services from birth or first disability diagnosis. The process is to educate and train them to be good citizens with professional jobs. If they are accepted and treated equally to others in the community, they can help themselves and participate in the development of the country. To promote the development of children with special needs we should bring children into normal environment as much as possible which includes educational assistance (Hegarty, 1993). The idea of bringing children into normal environments is believed to help special needs children have better lives. To receive education and other support encourages them to be normal in this society as much as possible. In order to provide special needs children to have life styles that are typical of most societies (Madden et al., 1996), we should bring children with special needs from special schools to mainstream education (Pope, 1992). In mainstream program, the educators found that the children with special needs have no difference in their test achievements compared with their peers in regular schools. Furthermore, they also have better social skills (Benja, 2002).

Children with special needs will have advantages with mainstream education. Teachers need to improve various factors such as the school environment, classroom environment, curriculum, measurement and evaluation. Teachers need to provide facilities, teaching aids, and assistance to suit the individual child's potential. However, these factors have not yet been adjusted enough or properly to suit the needs of each person. This is due to some teachers not being trained as special education teachers. Hence, they lack clarity in terms of knowledge and understanding of children with special needs. Providing inappropriate systems in mainstream education will have fewer benefits for the special needs students. Therefore, the ultimate goal of this research is to construct a training curriculum for teachers of children with special needs in primary schools, providing them with knowledge and understanding to better manage these children to suit the individual child's potential.

2. Purpose of the research:

1. To study the present situation of the special education services to special needs children at Primary Educational Service Area 1, Songkhla Province, Southern Thailand
2. To identify barriers and needs of teachers within mainstream programs
3. To construct a training curriculum for teachers and to assess the effectiveness of the proposed curriculum

3. Research Design:

The curriculum development program comprised of four steps:

3.1 Step 1: Study the present situation, the barriers and the needs of the teachers in providing special education in mainstream programs.

3.1.1 Population and sample

The populations were the teachers providing mainstream programs for children with special needs in the schools under Songkhla Primary Educational Service Area 1, Southern Thailand. The teachers were homeroom teachers, special education teachers, resource teachers and teachers' assistant, then selected 1 sample in each school. The total samples were 31.

3.1.2 The instruments:

The instruments used to collect the information were questionnaires which were divided into 5 parts.

- Part 1: Surveyed the number of students who have special needs attending schools in the academic year 2011. The types of disabilities were classified into nine different types.

- Part 2: There were 5 check lists of the status of the teachers.
- Part 3: The 10 questions about the present situation of the schools in providing mainstream program relating to their student support systems.
- Part 4: The problems in providing mainstream programs for special needs children.
- Part 5: Questions asking about the teachers' basic knowledge 24 topics needed for training and extra open ended questions or additional topics.

3.1.3 The collection of information:

Data was collected by sending questionnaires to the 31 samples. The questionnaires were distributed to one teacher in each school. The teachers could be classroom teachers, special education teachers, guidance or counselor teachers and teachers' assistant.

3.1.4 Findings and Discussion:

1. There were 521 special education students, most of them had learning disabilities (496 people, 95.20 %), the remaining children had physical or health impairments (11 people, 2.11 %), autism (5 people, 0.96 %). The rest were children had hearing impairments (3 people), intellectual disabilities (3 people), and multiple disabilities (3 people), each 0.57 %.
2. Information about the status of the respondents. The sample included 31 people as follows:
 - i. Sex: 26 females (83.87 %), and 5 males (16.13 %).
 - ii. Working experiences: Teacher's working experiences were 6-10 years (5 people, 48.39 %), 11-15 years (8 people, 25.81 %) and working experiences more than 26 years (5 people, 16.12 %). The least working experience was less than 5 years, (3 people, and 9.68 %).
 - iii. Education: Most of the teachers have bachelor degrees (21 people, 7.74 %), or higher (10 people, 32.26%).
 - iv. Special Education Degrees: 22 people were not special education teachers (70.97 %). Only 9 teachers have special education degrees (29.03 %).
 - v. The responsibility in mainstream programs: The sample in this research were 18 class teachers (58.06 %), 7 subject teachers, (22.58 %) and 6 special education teachers (19.35 %). There were neither resource teachers nor guidance teachers.
3. The present situation: The results showed more than 50 % of the schools provided only three of the ten supported activities mentioned in the questionnaire. 25 schools provided supported activities (80.65%), 18 schools provided evaluation adjustment /special equipment (58.06%), 17 schools provided teaching aid adjustments, (54.84%). The 7 remaining schools provided fewer than 50% of the supported activities. Only four school provided buddies or tutors as supported activities (12.90 %).
4. Problems in the mainstream program:
 - i. Personnel issues: including the teacher to student ratio not meeting the criteria. Teachers have to do extra work in schools (besides teaching).
 - ii. Teachers have not enough knowledge in dealing with children with disabilities, especially children with learning disabilities.
 - iii. Some administrators do not pay attention to mainstream programs.
 - iv. Teachers did not understand about how to manage the mainstream program, write lesson plans or evaluate the students
 - v. The head office pay less attention to the special needs students.
 - vi. Lack of teaching aids/media, information technologies to help in teaching children with special needs.
 - vii. The teachers pay less attention to the special needs students.
 - viii. Building / environment were inappropriate, with a lack of resource rooms for children with disabilities, especially children with learning disabilities.
 - ix. Lack of specific teachers in subjects such as music and art.
 - x. Lack of coordination between teachers and parents.
5. Recommendations:
 - i. The head office should provide more teachers

- ii. Training should be provided to enable teachers to have a deeper understanding of the mainstream program, especially regarding children with learning disabilities.
- iii. Training/Conferences/Seminars should be provided to create understanding and awareness of mainstream program.
- iv. Supervision from an outside organization should monitor the mainstream program.
- v. Provide teaching aids/media, and training teachers of children with special needs.
- vi. The schools should pay attention to mainstream programs.
- vii. Meetings between teachers and parents should be held to meet the agreement.
6. The topics that the teachers need to know: The teachers need to know the top 5 topics as follows:
 - i. The educational provision for children with learning disabilities.
 - ii. The media/ teaching aids for helping children with learning disabilities.
 - iii. Teaching skills.
 - iv. The individual education program (IEP).
 - v. The implementation of individual plans (IIP).

3.2 Step 2: Writing the curriculum for training purposes.

The draft training curriculum was written by.

1. Analyzing the documents and review relevant literature in mainstream programs. Analyze the topics needed in providing mainstream programs.
2. The training curriculum was divided into four units:
 - **Unit 1:** Knowledge about children with special needs.
 - **Unit 2:** Education for children with learning disabilities.
 - **Unit 3:** The individual education program (IEP) and the implementation of individual plans (IIP).
 - **Unit 4:** Media/teaching aids to assist children with learning disabilities
3. Examine by specialists

The training curriculum has been sent to the four specialists: one person in measurement and evaluation, one person in special education and two persons in curriculum. The training curriculum has been improved according to the recommendations.

3.3 Step 3: The trial of the training curriculum and its assessment was carried out.

This research was tried out and the effectiveness of the curriculum was found. The research design was one group pretest posttest.

1. The populations were the teachers providing mainstreaming programs for children with special needs in the leading schools project under Songkhla Primary Educational Service Area 1, Southern Thailand. The teachers were homeroom teachers, special education teachers, resource teachers and teacher's assistants, and then 1 sample was selected from each school. The total population was 31 people. The sample group of 20 representative teachers was selected, and then 1 teacher was randomly selected from each school.
2. Instrument:
 - i. The training curriculum
 - ii. Document: The document included handouts, worksheets, teaching aids (low /high technology), videos and guide books,
 - iii. Tools used for data collection include:
 - a. The pretest- posttest of knowledge was taken.
 - b. The test of knowledge was used to evaluate the effectiveness of the training. The test measured their cognitive knowledge after each training unit.
 - c. The questionnaire on the comment about the training courses.
3. The trial of the training curriculum and its assessment was carried out by the sample group of 20 representative teachers
4. The trial results
 - i. The participants took the test after the units training. They all have a grade point average of 80 % in all units: unit 1 equal to 82.67 %, unit 2 equal to 82.33, unit 3 equal to 81.00 % and unit 4 equal to 83.67 %.

- The average value is equal to 82.07.
- ii. The effectiveness of the training curriculum was 81.17/82.07 which indicates that the training curriculum created higher performance over 80/80 criteria.
 - iii. Achievement of the participants, the result obtained by comparing the average of the pretest and the average of the posttest of the participants. Using the Dependent t-test the average of the test score prior to the training is equal to the average value of 38.33, and after the training is equal to 81.17, which differ significantly at the .01 level.
 - iv. Assess the teachers' comments on the training curriculum

Part 1 Knowledge and understanding: It appears that after the training, the knowledge and understanding of the teachers and management in children with special needs, and their participation levels are high. The teachers have high knowledge and understanding of management in teaching children with special needs

Part 2 Additional suggestions on curriculum improvement include:

1. There should have more examples on English language teaching media to teach children with disability.
2. Increase the amount of time in unit 4: media/ teaching aids in teaching children with disabilities
3. The training should have 2 phases, so that the teachers can develop a continuous task.
4. Increase the amount of time in each training unit.

3.4 Step 4: Revise the training curriculum

The researchers gathered the data from the performance assessment of the training and documentation of the training. Documents were prepared for publication as well as revealed to other organizations.

4. The research summary and discussion of the results:

4.1 The training curriculum:

The objective in developing the training curriculum was to promote teachers to have knowledge and skills in teaching children with special needs in mainstream programs. The curriculum consists of 6 topics: (1) rationale (2) the objective of the training curriculum (3) the content of the training curriculum (4) the training activities (5) media used in training (6) measuring and assessment. The training period was 7 hours per day for 4 days, totaling 28 hours.

The conceptual framework of the research papers reviewed the documents and literature about the development of personnel in schools that provided mainstream programs. This was done to enhance the performance in the teaching of teachers. Most of the teachers who do not have special education will have more knowledge, understanding and confidence in teaching. This is consistent with the research report of the Bureau of Supervision and Development Educational Standards (2000), which found that the teachers will have anxiety about teaching activity.

When the achievement of children with special needs was measured, it was found to be lower than normal children. Friends did not accept them, increases the burden to the teachers. The teachers had bad attitudes towards mainstreaming programs. If the teacher receives training and instructional approaches to the children, the teacher will have peace of mind and will be willing to teach the children. And this is according to the concept of Chan (2004), who said that training is a systematic process. The systematic process will increase knowledge and skills in performing tasks including changes in practicing better behavior which will be beneficial to job responsibilities. Also in accordance with the research of Wijitporn (2001). She had improved the training curriculum; the result found that after the training, the participants increase their achievement effectively. This shows that the training curriculum can develop the teachers' achievement.

4.2 The performance assessment of training curriculum

The performance assessment based on the set criteria of 80/80, results showed that the effectiveness of the training curriculum was 82.07/81.17, slightly higher than the set criteria which indicating that the training curriculum was appropriate for implementation. This meets the concept of Chalerm Sri (2001), Napaporn and Jiraporn (2002) who found that the performance assessment exceeded 80, because the participants were keen and interested in training to enhance their knowledge and understanding. Moreover, during the training, the participants paid attention, and were interested in joining all the activities.

4.3 The achievement assessment of the participants

The achievement assessment of posttest scores obtained by using the t-test dependent. There was a significant different at the .01 level. The majority of the teachers are not special education teachers. After receiving the training, they received more knowledge and understanding of teaching children with special needs. Their knowledge after the training was statistically significant.

4.4 The assessment opinions regarding the training curriculum

On the assessment of the understanding and the benefits of the training, it was found that (1) after the training, the teachers indicated that they had more knowledge and understanding in the management of teaching children with special needs than before the training (2) the teachers could apply their knowledge and understanding in the management of teaching children with special needs in high levels (3) the teachers commented that they have increased their understanding and gained high benefits from the training.

The reason for this is because the teachers were not special education teachers, or they had not been trained by Office of The Basic Education Commission. When the teachers were trained, they increased their knowledge, understanding and skills in the management of teaching children with special needs. They have more confidence and can bring their knowledge and understanding of management in teaching children with special needs. This is consistent with Wantanee (2008), which found that teachers who teach in elementary levels also lack the skills required to teach students with special needs, and also agree that supporting is the first priority. All the teachers need to help each other in lesson plans and teaching. For learning together to be successful there must be coordination and planning for students. Consistent with the results of the study on the conditions of special education in Thailand. Division of Special Education (1999), which summarized the barriers, according to the opinion of the administrators, teachers. The opinions are: (1) lack of books, textbooks, and the various documents relating to the technical knowledge of children with disabilities (2) lack of learning materials to support teaching and learning activities for children with disabilities (3) teachers lack the knowledge and skills required to teach children with disabilities (4) teachers lack the knowledge to adjust worksheets (5) teachers lack knowledge as a resource (6) lack of supervision from supervisors. Moreover, the Bureau of Supervision and Development Educational Standards, (2000). Reported the research on "The development process in developing personnel, and special education teachers' year 1998-2000 and guidelines for future development". After studying the present situation, problems and obstacles in special education were seen through school principal and special education teachers' opinions. The opinions of the teachers included (1) too many students in a class room (2) There are few trained teachers (3) teachers lack confidence in teaching children with special needs (4) there were not any special education teachers in school or very few. Moreover, the teachers need to coordinate with others. And also in accordance with the research reports of Nonglak (2001) which found that most of the teachers who teach children with disabilities lack knowledge about special education. Furthermore, they lack books, text books, and teaching support supplements. Although, the government tries to promote all teachers to take part in training and self-study. The government also provides extra money, but it was not enough to produce and develop specialized teachers. From those reasons, the teachers had been trained on this curriculum. They have more knowledge, understanding and skills in the management of teaching children with special needs and have more confidence in the management of these areas.

5. Conclusion

This training curriculum provided to teachers who teach children with special needs in mainstream programs in Songkhla Primary Education Service Area Office 1, Southern Thailand. To train teachers to have more knowledge and skills in the management of teaching children with special needs in mainstream programs. This due to teachers who teach children with special needs not being special education teachers. Hence, they could gain more knowledge, understanding, and confidence in teaching children with special need. The content of the curriculum is mainly focused on children with learning disabilities which was the biggest group from the survey. And from the survey, the teachers needed knowledge in teaching children with learning disabilities.

From the trial with curriculum group training, it appears that after the training, the participants are trained in understanding and managing teaching children with special needs. They have more confidence, and are able to bring knowledge and understanding of special needs child management to use in their work. However, the development of the training curriculum has been conducted continuously, to keep up with the curriculum, information technology, and media, to meet the benefits of children with special needs.

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